

Umbridge's Challenge

by storylover18

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Summary: When educational decree number one hundred and twenty-three is announced at Hogwarts, Hermione, Harry, and Ron know they are in trouble. At the heart of their newest trial is their oldest enemy, Draco Malfoy, and he's supported by Hogwarts High Inquisitor and Headmistress, Dolores Umbridge. Set during Order of the Phoenix, mix of movie and book verse. *RATING VARIES PER CHAPTER*

1. Educational Decree Number 123

Educational Decree Number One Hundred and Twenty-Three: Special lessons will henceforth commence, taught by members of the Inquisitorial Squad and overseen by the Hogwarts Headmistress and High Inquisitor Dolores Jane Umbridge, to reinforce the methods of creating a peaceful Magical world as set out by the Ministry of Magic.

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><p>"What the bloody hell does that mean?" Ron exclaimed, reading the leaflet that had been left on the table in the Great Hall. "The other ones are clear enough â€“ no hands under cloaks, no howlers, no Quidditch â€“ but this?"<p>

Harry stayed silent and they both looked across the table at Hermione (who was a full thirty-six inches away, just to be safe).

"I don't know," she answered. "But I'm sure we'll hear about it soon."

"Well, I don't like the sound of it," Harry said. "'Reinforce the methods of creating a peaceful magical world as set out by the Ministry of Magic'? The Ministry think the way for a peaceful world is to ignore everything that's happen. They probably would like to see the back of me."

"Don't say that!" Hermione hissed. "They aren't going to try to get rid of you; they just want to cover up everything you've said about You Know Who."

"The Inquisitorial Squad is the part I don't like," Ron put in. "If Malfoy comes anywhere near me, I'll knock his teeth out."

"What do you think 'specific' means?" asked Harry.

"Maybe the lessons are very specific in nature?" Hermione guessed. "We'll just have to wait and see."

* * *

><p>"Attention students," Dolores Umbridge said in her sickeningly sweet voice. The new Headmistress of Hogwarts was standing behind Dumbledore's pedestal and could barely be seen behind the wing span of the owl. Umbridge cleared her throat daintily and waited until everyone in the Great Hall was looking at her; this took a considerably longer than it would have taken for Dumbledore and the professors at the staff table were doing nothing to help quiet the students.<p>

"Thank you," Umbridge said, smiling flakily. "I wish to speak to you about the arrangements that have been made for the special lessons indicated in educational decree number one hundred and twenty-three. These lessons are intended for students whom I consider lacking the proper education on what sort of behaviour will make our magical world even more magical."

If Umbridge was waiting for a murmur of laughter or wave of smiles, it never came and she continued.

"Your Heads of Houses will be speaking to the selected students and will provide the time and place of your lesson. If there are any questions, please ask your Head of House to make an appointment with me and I can assure you everything will be sorted as quickly as possible."

Umbridge left the pedestal and returned to Dumbledore's chair. The chatter in the hall resumed.

"That told us nothing," Ron complained, taking a bite of chocolate mousse. "I mean, who are the students? How are the lessons going to be taught?"

"I don't know," Harry said. "But I would bet all my gold that we're going to be in that group."

* * *

><p>Later that evening, Professor McGonagall came into the Gryffindor common room and read names off a piece of parchment.<p>

"Would Alicia Spinnet, Angelina Johnsn, Colin Creevey, Cormac McLaggen, Dean Thomas, Dennis Creavey, Fred Weasley, George Weasley, Ginny Weasley, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Katie Bell, Lavender Brown, Lee Jordan, Neville Longbottom, Nigel Wolpert, Parvati Patil, Romilda Vane, and Ron Weasley please assemble in front of the fire? I need to speak with you."

"Here we go," Harry muttered, leaving his books open on the table and joining the surge of people crowding around the sofa in front of the fireplace. Harry immediately noticed that Professor McGonagall looked upset and much older than she had at the beginning of the year.

"I have called you together because you are the Gryffindor students Professor Umbridge has selected to receive a special lesson."

"It's because we were members of Dumbledore's Army, isn't it?" asked Colin.

"I suspect so, Mr. Creavey." McGonagall answered. "You have been divided into groups by the Headmistress and each group has a specific time and place to report to."

"What will happen?" Parvati asked. "What are they going to do?"

"I'm afraid I can't answer that," the teacher said. "But I do wish to impart words you'd be wise to follow: the house of Gryffindor has always been home to exceptionally brave wizards and witches who have stood for what they know to be right. It is very possible that this lesson involves some sort of punishment or you may be asked to do something you do not agree with. Please know that if any of you decide you cannot do what is being asked of you, you will have my full support but I will not be able to help or protect you. Proceed knowing the cost of what will be required may be extremely high."

She looked directly at Harry for a brief moment and then held up her parchment again. As she announced the groups of students, Harry looked at Hermione.

"It'll be okay," she murmured. "They won't turn."

Harry knew she was probably right but the smallest part of him wanted them to. He didn't think he could stand to see his friends — all of those who had faith in him and what he knew to be true — hurt again. He couldn't be responsible for more deaths like Cedric's.

"Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, and Harry Potter."

Ron, who was closest to McGonagall, accepted the envelope she handed him. They returned to their table and Hermione took the envelope and ripped it open.

"Students: Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Harry Potter. Location: Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom. Time: This Thursday, 6:30 p.m. Instructor: -"

Hermione's eyes grew wide and her mouth fell open.

"What?" Harry exclaimed. "Who is it?"

"Instructor," Hermione repeated, her face pale. "Draco Malfoy, Inquisitorial Squad. Please leave your wands and any other magical objects in your dormitories."

"If she thinks I am going anywhere without my wand," Ron said bitterly. "She's off her rocker."

"Professor!" Harry called, hurrying to catch McGonagall before she left the common room. She stopped by the portrait hole.

"What is it, Potter?"

"This can't be right. Malfoy is supposed to teach our lesson."

"This is out of my hands. There is nothing I can do."

"He will try to kill us if there's no one else around." Harry said seriously. "His father was in the graveyard that night; they're supporting You Know Who."

"I'm sorry, Potter. Professor Umbridge has kept all her plans private so even if I wanted to do something, I couldn't."

She sighed.

"Let me sleep on it," she said finally. "When is your lesson?"

"6:30 on Thursday in the Defence Against the Dark Arts Classroom. Thank you, Professor."

"Don't thank me yet, Potter. I may not be able to help."

Harry nodded and Professor McGonagall climbed through the portrait hole. Harry returned to the table and told Hermione and Ron what she'd said.

"I don't like the look of this," Hermione said nervously. "We need a plan."

"How can we plan? We don't know anything."

"I wish there was a way I could talk to Sirius," Harry said.

"It's too dangerous," Ron said and Hermione nodded.

"We can think about this later," Hermione said after a few moments of each of them lost in their own thoughts. "Let's finish our homework."

* * *

><p>As Thursday drew closer, Harry, Hermione, and Ron, along with the rest of Hogwarts, began to notice strange thing, the most noticeable being students absent from lessons.</p>

"They're all DA members," Hermione whispered across breakfast Wednesday morning. "Or Inquisitorial Squad members."

"Where do you think they've gone?" Ron asked. Hermione shrugged.

"But not all of them are gone," Harry said. "There are too many DA members for the Inquisitorial Squad to deal with and I know some of them have had 'lessons' already but they're still here."

"Do you know who the lessons were with?"

Harry looked around the hall.

"Millicent Bulstrode," he said, pointing at the Slytherin girl across the Great Hall. "She was scheduled to 'instruct' Ginny, Pavarti, and Lavender yesterday."

The three looked around the Gryffindor table and, not surprisingly, didn't see any of the girls.

"We need to look for them," Ron said, much more invested now that his sister was among the missing.

"We can't miss class." Hermione protested.

"We'll say we're ill and ask to go to the hospital wing," Harry replied. "Once Madam Pomfrey gives us whatever potion we ask for, we can say we're going back to class but we'll start searching the castle instead."

Hermione sighed but agreed to skip the lesson. They decided Professor Binn's class was easiest to get out of and as soon as the bell rang, Harry put his hand up.

"Professor, I don't feel well. May I go to the hospital wing for some pepper-up?"

He was given permission and waited in the hall for Hermione and Ron to convince the ghost that Harry must be contagious because they, too, didn't feel well.

"Oh, I hope I don't miss anything important," Hermione said anxiously as they walked through the first floor corridors to the hospital wing.

"Why do we actually have to go to the hospital wing?" Ron asked. "We could just start searching now."

"Because if we get caught searching the castle, Madame Pomfrey will confirm that we've actually been up there for a potion. Otherwise, we'll just get in trouble for ditching History of Magic." Harry answered.

"What potion are we asking for?"

"Headache reducer," Hermione replied. "It's harmless and Madame Pomfrey won't be able to tell we don't actually need it. If she gave us pepper-up and steam doesn't start coming from our ears, she'd know we were faking."

"You think of everything," Ron said admirably. Hermione was too nervous to recognize the compliment and merely shrugged.

The trio arrived at the hospital wing and pushed open the big doors. Inside was a maze of screens and they looked at each other in surprise.

"What's going on?" Ron wondered out loud. "Is there some sort of sickness going around?"

As they were still unnoticed by the matron, Hermione hurried to the nearest screen and peered around it.

"Guys, come here!" she whispered urgently. Harry and Ron joined her on the other side of the screen and they found themselves starting at a very bruised, swollen, and sleeping Lavender Brown.

"Ginny!" Ron said urgently and bolted from the cubicle. Harry and Hermione quickly followed him and by some miracle didn't get caught as they checked behind every screen until they found Ginny.

"Ginny!" Ron exclaimed, coming to the edge of her bed. "Can you hear me?"

Ginny looked very much like Lavender. One of her eyes was black and blue, swollen shut; there was a nasty, yellowish bruise on her other cheek; and her lip had been split open and traces of dried blood were still visible.

Ginny slowly opened her eyes and tried to smile but it only caused her to groan.

"Shh," Hermione soothed, coming to her other side and taking Ginny's hand in hers. "Who did this to you?"

Ginny shook her head.

"Did they put a jinx on you to stop you from talking about it?"

Ginny nodded.

"Was it Millicent?"

Another nod.

"Did they use curses on you?"

Nod.

"And punches?" Harry asked.

Nod.

"Did you leave the castle?"

A hesitant shake no that changed to a nod.

"You don't know where you were?"

Shake.

"Did you go through any strange doors?"

Shake.

"Portkey?"

Nod.

"Did they tell you it was a portkey?"

Shake.

"Are you in pain?"

Shake.

Harry and Ron both breathed a sigh of relief at this answer. At least the potions were working to keep her comfortable.

"Are all the other people here members of the DA?"

Nod.

"And they were all hurt somehow?"

Nod.

"Excuse me," a sweet voice asked and Hermione, Ron, and Harry turned in horror to see Professor Umbridge standing at the entrance to the cubicle. "I believe you are supposed to be in class."

"We came here for a headache potion," Hermione said. She quickly dropped Ginny's hand.

"All of you?"

"Yes. We couldn't find Madame Pomfrey."

"That is because she is at St. Mungo's Hospital picking up supplies. If you will follow me, I will get your potions and escort you back to class."

They had no choice but to follow, though Ron quickly squeezed Ginny's hand on his way out. Umbridge led them into a small annex and pulled three phials of purple liquid off the shelf.

"Here you are," she said pleasantly.

The last thing Harry wanted to do was drink the potion — he didn't trust Umbridge — but he had no choice. However, nothing drastic happened when he swallowed the liquid and Ron and Hermione looked alright as well.

"Back to class now," Umbridge said, ushering them out. She led them back to Professor Binns's classroom.

"It would be best," she said crisply. "If you don't share what you just saw. If you do, I will know about it and you will be punished. You should also note that the hospital wing is strictly off-limits for visitors."

She opened the door for them and they shuffled back into their seats. Professor Binns didn't even notice.

"What potion did we just take?" Harry asked Hermione quietly.

"I'm not sure exactly but I bet it was jinxed. It's likely the same

potion she's been giving to everyone so they can't talk about what happened in the lessons."

"At least we found them," Harry sighed.

"Did you see Lavender and Ginny?" Ron exclaimed and quickly lowered his voice when a few people turned around. "They looked terrible."

"We need to work on our plan," Hermione said. "If that's what Millie did to them, imagine what Draco will try to do to us."

It was a chilling thought and one Harry couldn't escape for the rest of the day.

**Quick note that this is a mix of movie and book verse â€“ the biggest indicator being all the educational decrees from the movies that were not mentioned in the book. I hope that was good enough that you'll stick around for the next chapter! Reviews are very much appreciated, thank you. **

**Additionally, I'm pleased to announce a new writing initiative! I'm actually trying to schedule writing into my days now and I hope to always update on Friday evening. This doesn't just apply for this story but for all the stories I'm currently working on, including a few Merlin stories and one Cinderella one â€“ feel free to check them out if these are your fandoms =) **

2. The Lesson Begins

Disclaimer: I don't own Harry Potter.

**Hi, everyone! Thank you all so much for your interest in this story â€“ I hope it lives up to expectations! One quick note before letting you read the chapter: I realized as I was writing this chapter that the rating for this chapter should be considered at least an M for violence and torture. The rest of the story should be back around the K region but I'll be careful to let you know if the content prompts it going up again in later chapters. **

Harry, Ron, and Hermione didn't get a chance to talk about what they had seen until late Wednesday evening and even then they spoke very carefully so as not to set off the jinx Umbridge had put in their 'headache potion'.

In the end, however, it didn't matter how much they could or couldn't say because none of them could come up with a reasonable plan for getting out of their teaching appointment and since they didn't know what to expect apart from being bullied and beaten, there was no point in working on an escape plan. Professor McGonagall had never approached Harry to say she'd found a way to keep them safe. Harry found this particularly troubling as it meant that there was nothing standing in the way of what was happening. Umbridge and the members of the Inquisitorial Squad had free reign and ultimate authority in the hallways and classrooms of Hogwarts.

* * *

><p>Overall, the three friends felt vastly underprepared as they

walked towards the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom at twenty past six on Thursday evening.<p>

"Remember to keep calm," Hermione whispered. "Struggling with only make Malfoy enjoy it more."

Though she sounded confident, Hermione looked terrified. Harry wondered if he looked as pale as she and Ron and decided he probably did. He wasn't scared of pain — he'd endured enough of it by now — but he was angry and he knew his biggest challenge would be holding his tongue.

"Good evening, students," Professor Umbridge greeted them as they entered the classroom. Draco, in his robes featuring his Inquisitorial Squad badge, stood beside her. "Lovely, you're early. We can get started."

The room looked as it always did and Harry wondered if they were supposed to sit down.

"Please come up to the front," said Umbridge, seeming to read Harry's mind. "And stand in a line."

They did as they were told and it looked like the start of a Quidditch match: Gryffindor against Slytherin; good against evil; right against wrong.

Professor Umbridge stepped down from the raised platform and stopped only a foot away from them.

"You have been selected for a special teaching lesson," Umbridge began. "Because it is my belief that you do not understand the finer principles of creating a peaceful magical world. Throughout history, it has been evident to those of us with magical abilities that the proper hierarchy is paramount to creating order from chaos."

Harry could already feel his blood beginning to boil but Umbridge wasn't finished.

"Every person, being, thought, and action has its place in the hierarchy of magical cooperation and this is the lesson that Mr. Malfoy will be instructing you in this evening."

Harry glared at Umbridge and she smiled back innocently.

"Mr. Malfoy has received proper training in this area and everything he says and does is fully endorsed by me and, by extension, the Ministry of Magic. Once Mr. Malfoy is satisfied with your performance, you will be free to go. Before the lesson commences, I must ask you a question. You were instructed to leave your wands and all other magical devices in your dormitories. Did you honour that request?"

This was something the three had talked about briefly and while none of them liked the idea of going anywhere without their wands — especially somewhere alone with Draco and Umbridge — they couldn't think of a good way to conceal them. If they brought them and were found out, not only would their wands be confiscated, they would likely be punished.

"Well, answer me."

"Yes." The voices said in unison. Professor Umbridge raised an eyebrow.

"I see," she said. "Forgive me, but I must insist on checking."

She held out her wand.

"Revelio," she said, pointing at the three of them. Nothing happened.

"Very good," praised Umbridge, apparently pleased that her students had listened to her. "We can proceed now. Mr. Malfoy?"

Professor Umbridge moved aside and Draco joined her in front of them. He pulled an envelope from within his robes and held it out.

"Please take hold of the envelope," he said. Harry realized this must be the portkey Ginny had acknowledged in the hospital wing.

He glanced at Ron and Hermione and the three of them reached out and took hold of the envelope. Professor Umbridge raised her wand, tapped the parchment, and they disappeared.

* * *

><p>Unlike most portkeys, the four of them did not come hurtling towards earth at great speeds. Instead, they were holding onto the envelope in exactly the same positions they had been while in the classroom but yet they had appeared somewhere new. Harry could see why Ginny thought it was still part of Hogwarts. The walls, floor, and ceiling were all made of stone, though there were no windows and no doors.<p>

"Right," Draco said, tucking the envelope back into his robes.
"Welcome to class."

He wore a wicked smile and Harry met his eyes.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"It doesn't concern you," answered Draco. "And the first rule in this class is that questions are not permitted. If you break this rule, there will be dire consequences."

This was no surprise to any of them and Harry was reminded of living with the Dursleys. Unfortunately, the stakes were much higher here than they had been there and Harry knew this rule was going to be difficult to follow.

"The second rule is that none of you may interfere when I am dealing with another student," Draco continued. "I have been permitted to use restraints but the Ministry of Magic hopes that you will willingly do what is required to complete your instruction."

"If you are waiting for us to admit that Harry is wrong about You Know Who coming back," Ron said. "You're going to be here a long time."

"Rule number three," Draco hissed, glaring at Ron. "Is that you do not speak unless spoken to."

The three stayed silent and Draco smiled.

"Very good." He began pacing in front of them. "The lesson is simple enough. You must openly and honestly state that you do not believe that He Who Must Not Be Named has returned and that everything he has been saying is nothing more than a desperate cry for attention."

Draco stopped in front of Harry.

"And you must fully admit that the story is a made up fantasy."

Malfoy began pacing again.

"You must also fully acknowledge that there is a hierarchy of blood status among witches and wizards; further to this point, you must recite creatures of near-human intelligence in order of their usefulness and place within the Ministry. Do I make myself clear?"

None of them moved a muscle.

"Answer me!" Draco bellowed. "Is that clear?"

Again no one spoke and they continued staring straight ahead. Draco strode up to Hermione, who he was closest to, and slapped her across the cheek.

Hermione gasped and her hand flew to her face.

"Hermione!" Ron exclaimed and the next thing Harry knew, Malfoy had flicked his wand in Ron's direction and he was sailing through the air. Ron hit the wall with a sickening crash and crumpled to the floor.

"I said," Draco repeated, turning back to Hermione. "Is that clear?"

She nodded ever so slightly.

"Good."

Draco walked away.

"Get up, Weasley," he called. Ron limped over to Harry and Hermione and took his place in line again. Harry glanced at him and Ron nodded discreetly to say he was okay.

"Alright," Draco said, standing with his arms crossed. "This does not have to be hard. Who will be the first to complete the task?"

"What if we lie?" Harry asked clearly. "How will you know we're telling the truth?"

Draco pointed his wand at Harry as he walked towards him.

"Are you really that stupid, Potter, that you would break one of the rules after seeing what I've already done to your friends?"

"No." Harry answered. "But I want to know how you'll know we're telling the truth. I could spiel off all of those things you mentioned but you wouldn't for a moment believe me which makes me wonder how we're ever going to get out of here. What do we need to do to prove that what we're saying is what we believe?"

"That's the beauty of it," answered Draco. "It's entirely at my discretion. Only once I believe you are genuine do I get to end the lesson."

"So you're basically going to torture us until we're almost dead, make us say the words, and then let us go."

"It depends on what kind of mood I'm in," said Draco. Maybe it was the light tone of Draco's voice that made Harry unsuspecting of the punch but he felt the impact of Draco's fist across his nose. When he spoke again, Malfoy's voice was cold and unfeeling.

"That should give you a good idea of what kind of mood I'm in now."

Blood began to pour from Harry's nose but he tried not to move and he held Draco's stare.

"I see I've got my work cut out for me," Draco laughed. "You're going to fight me every step of the way, aren't you, Potter?"

Harry didn't reply.

"Answer me!" Draco demanded. "Or I'll hit Granger again."

"Don't answer him, Harry." Hermione said quickly and Draco whirled towards her.

"I'll pretend I don't take pleasure in doing this," he said, slapping her across the face again.

"Leave her alone!" Ron yelled as Hermione cried out in pain. "If you're going to hurt someone, hurt me."

"Ah, the Gryffindor spirit coming to the surface," snarled Draco. "Sweet on her, are you? Want to protect her? I'm afraid that's not the way it works, Weasley."

Draco hit Hermione a third time and tears were now running out of Hermione's swollen eyes.

"Do you have anything you want to say to me, Granger?"

Hermione shook her head.

"No."

"No?" Draco repeated. "Then I suppose I'd better do a better job at convincing " I mean teaching " you."

"DO NOT TOUCH HER!" bellowed Ron and he ran towards Draco, taking a

flying leap onto his shoulders. Draco hadn't been expecting this but struggled against Ron's hold. He managed to free his wand hand and sent Ron flying again.

"That is going to cost you, Weasley," he said darkly, walking towards where Ron was lying on the ground.

"No!" Harry yelled and this time he ran to Ron's aid. Draco had been anticipating this, however, and Harry felt like he had been tackled to the ground and stepped on by a giant. Harry didn't know what curse Malfoy had used but the wind had been knocked out of him. He was still on the floor when he heard Hermione's shrill cry.

"Protego horibillis!"

The shimmering blue-white light shot from Hermione's wand and formed a barrier in the few inches between Ron and Draco. The shield grew and within seconds the room was divided, Draco on one side and Ron, Harry, and Hermione on the other.

"Ron!" Hermione cried, hurrying over to him. Harry saw Draco's look of shock transform into one of fury but no matter what he did, he couldn't penetrate the shield. Hermione knelt next to Ron.

"Are you alright?" she asked.

"How did you manage to get your wand passed Umbridge?" Harry wheezed, pushing himself up.

"Shh!" hissed Hermione. "The spell will keep Malfoy from being able to touch us but he can hear through it if we speak loud enough."

"How did you get your wand passed Umbridge?" Harry repeated in a quieter, but no less amazed, tone of voice.

Hermione reached beneath her blouse and pulled out a small leather bag.

"Professor McGonagall gave it to me," she whispered. "Only the person who places objects in it can retrieve them and it doesn't answer to summoning or revealing spells."

"When did she give it to you?"

"It was hidden inside a book she gave me during Transfiguration this morning. The note said it had belonged to Dumbledore and that I should use it to bring my wand and anything else I thought would be useful tonight. She said it was the only type of help she was able to provide."

Harry, despite their situation, beamed.

"You are brilliant, Hermione."

"It wasn't me," Hermione answered. "It was McGonagall's idea."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Ron asked, leaning against the wall heavily

"It needed to be a complete secret. If I was found out, you and Harry

wouldn't have been implicated but I also couldn't risk either of you accidentally giving it away. I suspected Umbridge would search us for wands but I didn't know how. If she had used veritaserum or one of the unforgivable curses, it was safer for you not to know."

"What else have you got in there?"

"Not much," Hermione admitted. "I didn't know what might be useful. I wanted to bring your wands but I realized that if I got caught and had all three, we'd all be in trouble. I'm sorry."

"It's alright," said Harry, though he was disappointed that his holly and phoenix feather wand was still in his trunk in Gryffindor Tower. He'd have felt much safer with it in his grasp. Still, one wand was better than none. "How are you feeling, Ron?"

"I'm alright," Ron answered. "Your nose looks broken, Harry."

"It is, I think."

"Let's move to the furthest corner," suggested Hermione. "And we can clean ourselves up a bit."

Harry and Hermione helped Ron up and while he could walk, he slumped against the wall and slid back to the floor as soon as he could. Harry glanced over his shoulder and saw Draco pointing his wand at the shield, trying to break it.

"Will it work?" Harry asked Hermione. She shook her head.

"Not unless he read ahead in our texts last year," she said. "That spell is from NEWT level Defence Against the Dark Arts. He won't know any spells strong enough to break it."

"Do you think he'll bring us back and tell Umbridge?" Ron asked.

"No," Harry answered. "If he was going to do that, he would have done it already. He must've been threatened by Umbridge not to come back before the job was done."

"But we can't get out of here without him."

"We could threaten him ourselves," Hermione suggested but Harry shook his head.

"We can't do anything rash," he said. "We need to have a strong plan before we break the shield, or even talk to him."

"We could put a full body bind on him when he's sleeping."

"I don't think he'll let his guard down."

"He'll have to fall asleep at some point," Hermione pointed out. "We have plenty of time to think of something."

* * *

><p>By midnight, Draco had succumbed to sitting in the opposite corner, glaring at the three of them through the glistening

shield.<p>

"He's trying to think of what he should do," Ron said. "I just know it."

"We can't worry about what he's doing," Harry answered. "We need to focus on ourselves. Hermione, you don't have any food in there, do you?"

"No, I'm sorry. At least we can get water."

"And put it in what?"

Hermione pointed at the floor and muttered a spell under her breath. A hole formed and she filled it with the aguamenti spell.

"Good thinking," Harry said. "I don't suppose you have our cloaks or a blanket?"

"No, but I can make a fire."

Next to the water hole, Hermione made a brightly burning fire and instantly the stone room began filling with warmth. Harry noticed that on the other side of the shield, Draco was copying them. He, too, made a fire though he appeared to be struggling to make a hole to fill with water.

"We should get some rest," said Harry. "But we should keep watches. I don't like the idea of all of us being asleep and Malfoy being awake."

"Before we go to sleep," Hermione spoke up. "We need to make a plan for tomorrow."

"I'm not going to do what he wants, Hermione."

"I know that, neither will I," Hermione answered. "I'm pretty sure the portkey envelope has something to do with getting back. If we can just get that, I can try and figure out if there's an incantation that goes along with it."

"Malfoy's not going to give that up easily," Ron said.

"What if I challenge him for it?" Harry wondered.

"How do you mean?"

"What if I was to challenge him to a duel? If I win, we get the envelope and if he wins â€¢ if he wins, I'll tell him what he wants to hear."

"No, that's way too risky." Hermione instantly said. "Besides, if you're going to duel him, why wouldn't you ask to get out of here if you win?"

"He'd never go for that," Ron pointed out. "At least this way he'd likely agree knowing that without the incantation or whatever needs to happen with the envelope, we're no further ahead."

"You'd have to find a way to make sure you win," said Hermione.

"I know," Harry answered. "I was thinking about using the imperius curse."

"No, you can't! It's illegal, Harry."

"So is what he and Umbridge are doing to us."

"But the Ministry has approved what they're doing. If they find out you used an unforgivable curse on a member of the Inquisitorial Squad, they won't hesitate to expel you and send you to Azkaban. You're already pressed your luck with your hearing at the beginning of the year and Dumbledore can't save you this time."

"I know," Harry said. "But it's the only thing I can think of."

"Then let me do it," said Hermione.

"No way," both Ron and Harry said at the same time.

"Why not?"

"I don't want anything to happen to you," Harry said firmly. "Either of you. This entire thing is my fault and I'll face it myself."

"It's my wand," Hermione insisted. "It will listen best to me."

Harry wavered; she had a point.

"Okay," he said finally. "But you can't hesitate to use it."

"I won't." Hermione said. "If I feel that it's necessary, I will use the imperius curse."

"Hermione," Harry replied seriously. "You need to be committed to using it."

"I am," repeated Hermione. "But honestly, Harry. You've spent months teaching us how to duel and fight our opponents. If I can win against Malfoy without getting myself expelled, I'm going to do it that way."

"Just as long as you're sure you'll be able to use the curse if it comes to it."

"I'm sure."

Harry glanced at Ron and he shrugged.

"Okay," Harry conceded. "We can challenge Draco to the duel tomorrow morning. If we stand close enough and shout, will he be able to hear us through the shield?"

Hermione nodded.

"It's settled then."

"I'll take first watch," Ron volunteered. "You two get some sleep."

Hermione handed Ron her wand and then lay down next to the fire, squirming to find the most comfortable position on the hard stone.

"You too, Harry." Ron said. Harry smiled at his friend and did as he was told. Despite the fire, he shivered on the cold floor but soon fell asleep.

Reviews are much appreciated, thank you!

End
file.